

Listing of the Claims

Claims 1-12 (Cancelled)

Claim 13 (Currently Amended): A method for manufacturing a thin-film magnetic recording medium, comprising the steps of :

forming a laminate for magnetic data recording on a nonmagnetic substrate;

said step of forming being a dry processes in a vacuum atmosphere;

forming a protective layer on said laminate;

said step of forming a protective layer being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

plasma-etching a first surface of said protective layer;

said step of plasma-etching conducted in a vacuum and in a process gas mixture consisting
of ~~comprising~~ an inert gas, an oxygen gas, and a nitrogen gas;

conducting the steps of forming a laminate, forming a protective layer, and plasma-etching continuously; and

forming a lubricant layer on said first surface of said protective layer, whereby surface defects are minimized and surface quality is greatly improved.

Claim 14 (Previously Presented) A method, according to claim 13, wherein:

said step of forming said laminate for magnetic data recording is at least one method selected from the group consisting of sputtering, ion plating, plasma CVD, and vacuum deposition.

Claim 15 (Previously Presented): A method, according to claim 14, wherein:

said step of forming said protective layer is a method selected from the group consisting of sputtering, ion plating, plasma CVD, and vacuum deposition.

Claim 16 (Previously Presented): A method, according to claim 13, wherein:

said process gas mixture further comprising a gas selected from the group consisting of a chlorine gas and a fluorine gas.

Claim 17 (Previously Presented): A method, according to claim 14, wherein:

said process gas mixture further comprising a gas selected from the group consisting of a chlorine gas and a fluorine gas.

Claim 18 (Original): A method according to claim 15 wherein:

said step of plasma-etching is conducted in a process gas mixture contain the process gas mixture of Ar, O₂, and N₂ where the mixing ratio thereof is substantially 6: 1: 3.

Claim 19 (Cancelled)

13. Claim 20 (Withdrawn) A magnetic recording medium produced by the method of claim